

# critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## Future New York Opening

Two On the Aisle-Mark Hellinger, 7/12/51. Bert Lahr and Dolores Gray star in new musical revue presented by Arthur Lesser. Music by Jule Styne, lyrics and sketches by Betty Comden and Adolph Green.

## Digests of Current Reviews

Courtin' Time-National, 6/7/51. Pleasant, pardonable summer entertainment is verdict of four weekly reviewers on Russo, Ellis and Cohen musical. But Francis, Billboard, Keating, Cue, feared that weak adaptation by William Roos of Eden Phillpotts' "The Farmer's Wife" took unfair advantage of talented cast. Joe E. Brown, Billie Worth and show-stopping songs by Carmen Mathews were lauded by all. Variety, Time, Newsweek and New Yorker critics filed mildly favorable reviews. They agreed that Lawrence and Walker's music was listenable, but not unusual. Supporting cast of youngsters was praised. Francis enjoyed only first half of show. While Keating considers the term 'summer entertainment' a commentary of what the critics think of this season in New York.

## Broadway Hits Revisited

Affairs of State-Music Box, 9/25/50. Trade papers critics found that Louis Verneuil play which started as a comedy has turned into a farce. With June Havoc in the leading role, replacing Celeste Holm, the cast continually mugs, milking every laugh line. But Hobe, Variety, and Francis, Billboard, agree it remains a slick, summer, commercial entertainment. Keating, Cue, doubts if even the considerable talents of Miss Havoc can make the antiquated French farce palatable.

Twentieth Century-Fulton, 12/24/50. Robert Preston and Binnie Barnes, who followed Jose Ferrer and Gloria Swanson into leads of Hecht-MacArthur revival, are no match for their predecessors. This is the opinion of Keating, Cue, and Francis, Billboard. While Cue thought their lower candle power performances served to point up the really high quality of the script, Francis wondered how long the show can last without its former stars. Trade paper critic found Barnes wholly inadequate for the role. Earlier Scho, Variety, had panned hoked up and sloppy performances of Ferrer and Swanson as inexcusable. He got the feeling that the company as a whole was calloused towards paying customers.

## Summer Theatre Tryout

Edward Mabley's Glad Tidings, tried out at Somerset, Mass., summer theatre, by Harold Bromley with a cast including Melvyn Douglas, and Signe Hasso, may be ready for Broadway with some polishing, comments Malo, Variety. It is a provocative romantic comedy finely produced.

## Editorial Pros & Cons

Probably nothing can ever be done to end the evil habit of theatre display ads with misconceived quotes. But critics don't have to go out of their way to make the press agent's job easier. Recently a first string critic admitted he was so overcome by the power of a drama that he forgot to include the "usual quotes". To make amends he provided them in an additional column.

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 ' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '  
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|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. NY Times             | 11. Women's Wear Daily  | 21. Freeman              |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune    | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal           |
| 3. NY News              | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue                  |
| 4. NY Mirror            | 14. George Jean Nathan  | 24. Chr. Science Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass           | 15. Ward Morehouse      | 25. Sat. Review Lit.     |
| 6. NY Post              | 16. Morning Telegraph   | 26. Newsweek             |
| 7. NY Journal American  | 17. Variety             | 27. Time                 |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard           | 28. Nation               |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle       | 19. Theatre Arts        | 29. New Republic         |
| 10. Newark News         | 20. New Leader          | 30. New Yorker           |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "Pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50.

- Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.
- None: 16-21-23-28.
- 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3. None: 16-21.
- Cont 1-4-10. None: 14-15-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30.

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50.

COURTIN' TIME-6/7/51.

DARKNESS AT NOON-1/13/51.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50.

GRAMERCY GHOST-4/23/51.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50.

THE HAPPY TIME-1/24/50.

THE KING AND I-3/29/51.

KISS ME KATE-12/31/48.

MAKE A WISH-4/18/51.

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51.

OKLAHOMA-5/29/51.

THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51.

SEASON IN THE SUN-9/28/50.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/8/49.

STALAG 17-5/8/51.

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51.

TWENTIETH CENTURY-12/24/50.

- Con: 1-14-17-19-22-24-26-29.
- Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.
- Con: 1-2-4-5-6-10-11-14-17-22-25-26-27-30.
- None: 13-15-16-19-20-21-23-24-28-29.
- Con: 28.
- Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30. None: 10-21.
- Con: 28. None: 19-21.
- Con: 29. None: 21-28.
- Con: 1-5-6-14-23-24-27-28-29-30.
- None: 19-21-25.
- Con: 14-19. None: 21-25-28.
- None: 19-20-21-22-25-26-27-28-29-30.
- Con: 4-6-7-14-19-21-24-25-27.
- None: 12-20-22.
- Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10.
- None: 7-13-15-16-21.
- Con: 27. None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28-29.
- Con: 4-20-23-28-30. So-So: 3. None: 19-21.
- Con: 2-7-14-18-20-25-27-28.
- None: 15-19-21.
- Con: 5-21-24-28. None: 4-14-15-16.

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 ' Book\_Notes '  
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Show business books to be published in the fall by Simon & Schuster include "Treasury of the Theatre," three volume reference edited by John Gassner; Al Hirschfeld's "Show Business Is No Business" and "Rodgers & Hart Song Book" edited by Jack Goodman...Charlotte Greenwood working on her autobiography at her West Coast home...Times Best Seller list has Ethel Water's "His Eye Is On the Sparrow" in fourth place, "We Barrymores" in tenth place and "Mary Garden's Story" in 14th place.

Atkinson's "Once Around the Sun" received rave unanimous reviews from all of the book reviewers in NY as well as from most of his drama critic colleagues..."Mary Garden's Story" highly recommended by Morehouse, WT&S, Pollock, Compass.

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' Green Room Department '  
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SECOND NIGHT BLUES...A sign of genuine theatrical despair is that the magazine critics often constitute the entire second night population at a play which is not spectacularly successful and which does not win immediate first night approval from the critics, states Kerr, Commonweal. There is no curiosity audience, no habitual audience, no diehard bunch of enthusiasts who will go to a play to see promising performances, to keep abreast of the early work of possible playwrights, or who simply like the theatre well enough to drop in wherever it is operating. Even the trade doesn't support the theatre.

COLUMN TIPS...Legitimate theatre will get going over from House Un-American Committee, hints Walker...Rodgers & Hammerstein's next musical will feature a 7:30 PM opening night curtain, reports Morehouse...Broadway drug stores' phones tapped to track down dope peddlers, whispers Sullivan.

ACTING ADVICE...Ninety-eight per cent of the free advice given young actors is worthless and 60 per cent is downright dangerous, warns Burr, Playbill. But the exception is note by Seventeen stage manager Robert Downing to the newcomers in the cast. His first precept keynotes the entire list. "Enter the stage door with humility and eagerness and hope. You follow a number of great artists through that door." Burr adds the thought that every youngster should realize that a single job does not automatically create a stage career.

NATHAN'S PRIZE SOLUTION...Let a new group composed of the more competent and experienced drama critics, together with respected theatre authorities, meet in secret to pick the best plays and performances of the year, suggests George Jean Nathan. Then swear them all to secrecy and spend the money usually used for scrolls on drinks for themselves. While Nathan admits this solution to the Pulitzer and Critics prize controversy is his most intelligent idea in years, he doubts if it is possible. Too many of the committees want the publicity for themselves.

NEW FACES...The reason Broadway is excited about Oklahoma all over again, remarks Durling, Journal American, is simply that it has new faces. This is the same thing which made Carmen Jones a hit. Film box office receipts are fading because the public is tired of old familiar faces.

SUMMER GUIDE...Garland, Journal American, and Pollock, Compass, and Morehouse, WT&S, agree that Broadway is still a wonderful place to visit in summer time. Every show is worth while seeing, and there are plenty of other things to do.

BEST PERFORMANCE LISTS...Helen Hayes in Hollywood making "My Son John", forwarded her list of favorite performances to the drama editors. It included John Barrymore in Hamlet, Shirley Booth in Come Back, Little Sheba, Marlon Brando in A Streetcar Named Desire, Pauline Lord in They Knew What They Wanted, Laurence Olivier in Oedipus Rex, Laurette Taylor in The Glass Menagerie...Sheaffer, Eagle, asks readers to forward their lists.

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' Theatre News Round Up '  
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Tom Prideaux, Life, combining business with his four week Europe vacation...Irving Hoffman, Hollywood Reporter, off to India...August "Theatre Arts" to feature articles on Hollywood by Morehouse, WT&S, and Chapman, News...George Brandt ordered his "Subway Circuit" closed down July 1st due to dispute with Association of Theatre Press Agents...Ticket brokers and subscription clubs start talks to work out ticket code...Dramatists Guild and League of New York Theatres nearing new basic agreement...New Runyon Award Committee members include General MacArthur and J. Edgar Hoover.

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' Interview Hi-Lights '  
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REGINALD LAWRENCE...American Theatre Wing School playwrighting teacher admitted to WNBT Hi Jinx that he doesn't give his students secret tips for writing hits. If the Out of This World author knew of any such formula he would use it himself. Starting this term the school will admit experienced non-professionals. The TV show interviewed three typical students who comprise the classes at the school.

RODOLPHO USIGLI...Mexico's top modern playwright deserves being presented on Broadway by a commercial producer or ANTA, urges Pollock, Compass. His talents are international. He can write like Chekhov and he has in him a touch of Shaw. Yet he is always Mexican. His latest hit is The Child and the Mist.

LOUIS VERNEUIL...Affairs of State author, who is planning two plays for next season, sees a bright future for the theatre, he told Coleman, Mirror. If the so-called commercial theatre does not develop new playwrights of importance, then perhaps our tributary groups will. The summer theatres, little theatres, college and community theatres are not asleep.

ROBERT WRIGHT...New Kiss Me Kate leading man suggests every actor should go on a tour to get out of the New York rut, Rice, Post, reports. Middle western audiences are more reserved than those on either coast. Toronto and Montreal are very demonstrative. Every city is different from New York in its theatre audiences. Wright was understudy to two roles in the musical before he won his present part.

BOB SMITH...Gramercy Ghost actor wishes some one would do something about the many different people named "Bob Smith" in show business, he complained to MBS Sardis. This particular Smith is playing in his first straight comedy after a background of musicals. The latter are easier to do than plays because dancing and music can carry a weak performance.

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' NY Critics In London '  
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A Sleep for Prisoners, Christopher Fry's latest play being presented in England's churches, contains some of the poet's best writing, comments Clurman, New Republic. He says many good things in his play and says them with a tenderness and humor that are rarely marred, this time, by his word coquetry. Sole fault is that play is more of an incantation than a drama.

Alec Guinness' Hamlet, which received critical drubbing from English reviewers, is one of the most fascinating performances Watts, Post, has ever seen. After viewing most of it twice he still isn't sure that he approves of it. The star creates feeling of improvisation in the classic, making the play seem as if it was being presented for the first time. But Watts does wish it had more lyricism and emotion in the performance. Its intellectual integrity is close to magnificent. The production and the supporting cast are not up to one of the world's most accomplished actors.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Morehouse, WT&S, viewing shows in San Francisco...Labor union papers pledge support to revival of live theatre...Howard Lindsay and Dorothy Stickney received honorary degrees from Bowdoin College...Shuberts fined for failing to set aside royalties to Hassard Short, Peep Show director...Feuer and Martin will hold weekly talent auditions...Actors Equity banned English actresses Sarah Churchill and Deborah Kerr from summer circuit...Bond sign in Times Square plugs Runyon Fund Ticket Service with offices in Hotel Astor...ANTA netted \$21,000 from ball aboard luxury liner Constitution.

